

# Reach

**Tooele**  
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## M55 rockets determined stable for storage

The U.S. Army recently completed comprehensive laboratory testing on M55 rockets and concluded that the rockets can continue to be stored safely until they are destroyed at its state-of-the-art chemical weapons disposal facilities. The extensive testing was conducted to ensure that the aging rockets are stable and unlikely to auto-ignite.

The Army produced 400,000 M55 rockets in the early to mid-1960s to protect U.S. soldiers from enemy attack. These weapons, which were declared obsolete in 1981, have since been stored safely and are awaiting disposal at Army installations in Alabama, Kentucky, Utah and Oregon. The M55 rockets stored at Tooele's Deseret Chemical Depot are being destroyed using incineration technology at the Tooele Chemical Agent Disposal Facility.

Each rocket weighs nearly 60 pounds, is almost 7 feet long and contains approximately 10 pounds of chemical nerve agent (VX or GB). The rockets also contain M28 propellant, which has degraded naturally over time through a series of chemical reactions that generate heat.

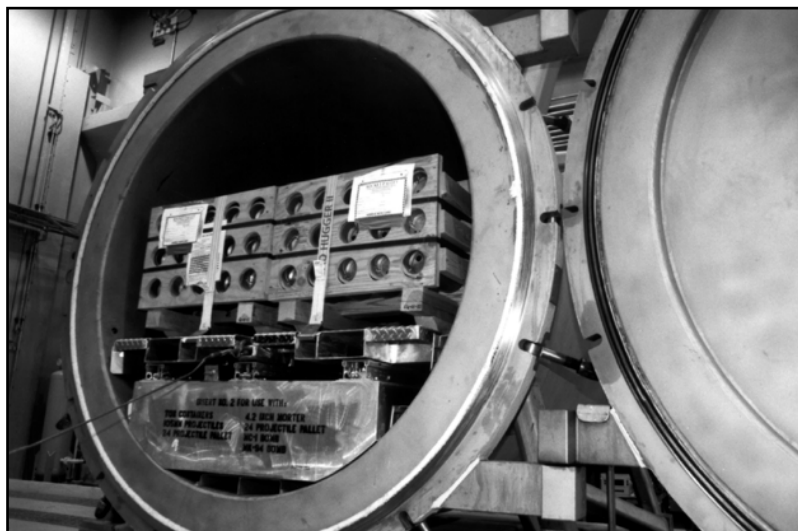
When the propellant was manufactured, chemical compounds called stabilizers were added to control the rate of this chemical reaction. However, as the stabilizer degrades over time, the propellant could generate enough heat to auto-ignite the rocket.

The Army developed detailed computer models and conducted testing on rocket samples to evaluate the likelihood of rocket auto-ignition. "The evaluations demonstrate

that it is very unlikely the aging M55 rockets will auto-ignite, and they can continue to be stored safely while awaiting disposal," said Col. Christopher Lesniak, Project Manager, Chemical Stockpile Disposal. Furthermore, he explained, the testing demonstrated that uncontaminated rocket propellant is stable for at least 100 years. Agent contamination accelerates deterioration; however, only small portions of the propellant samples showed effects of contamination.

The testing also found that rockets are at risk for auto-ignition from external events such as lightning or earthquake. "The only way to ensure complete protection of the public and environment is to destroy the rockets safely and efficiently. We are making significant progress towards this goal," said Lesniak.

*TOCDF workers safely destroyed the GB-filled M55 rockets and are now preparing to destroy the VX-filled rockets.*



*M55 rockets are transported safely from storage igloos to the disposal facility in an on-site container.*

## Depot origins remembered

By Richard Trujillo

Deseret Chemical Depot Natural & Cultural Resource Manager

### ***“RUSH VALLEY WILL HAVE U.S. CHEMICAL WARFARE DEPOT”***

#### ***Immediate Possession of Land Ordered by U.S. Judge***

The above headline appeared in the *Tooele Transcript Bulletin* on May 15, 1942. Judge Tillman I. Johnson, in a condemnation suit brought before him by the U.S. government, ordered the takeover of approximately 20,000 acres of Rush Valley land including the ranches and water rights of Mark and Merlin Johnson, and the Hatch Bros. Company. These two ranches consisted of approximately 2,500 acres and included the area where the disposal facility, depot administration area and the Johnson Cemetery presently stand.

In February 1942, Maj. Gen. William N. Porter, Chemical Warfare Services chief, selected Rush Valley as the depot's location. He was immediately sold on the location because the area was safe from possible enemy attack and capable of quickly supplying the war effort in the Pacific. The locale also met his other requirements such as adequate road and rail facilities, and it was away from heavily populated areas.



*Flag Raising Ceremonies at DCD, July 11, 1943. This 88-foot flagpole was constructed from scrap metal by depot employees. (photo appeared in the *SLC Tribune* on Mon., July 12, 1943, with subtitle of “Soldiers Pay Tribute to Old Glory”)*

***“The depot will be a place of storage...But it is a tremendous installation and one vital to the defense of this nation.”***

—Col. E.B. Blanchard,  
Chemical Warfare  
Services Commander,  
Dec. 1, 1942

Col. E.B. Blanchard of the Chemical Warfare Services was assigned commander and tasked with facility construction. In June 1942, the installation officially was named Deseret Chemical Warfare Depot.

Approximately 4,000 employees were hired to build the depot, however, extreme working conditions resulted in less than 1,000 workers on the job. The employees lived and worked in the isolated desert area during extremely hot summer and frigid winter months without proper housing facilities (mostly tents). The massive construction project also created a huge dust bowl, and once, following a severe dust storm, approximately 200 workers quit their jobs by the end of the day.

In an article that appeared on Dec. 1, 1942, in the *Salt Lake City Tribune*, Col. Blanchard said, *“The depot will be a place of storage...But it is a tremendous installation and one vital to the defense of this nation.”*

The following year, on Sun., July 11, 1943, dedication and flag raising ceremonies were conducted. Approximately 1,300 civilian guests, 500 depot employees and 200 military personnel

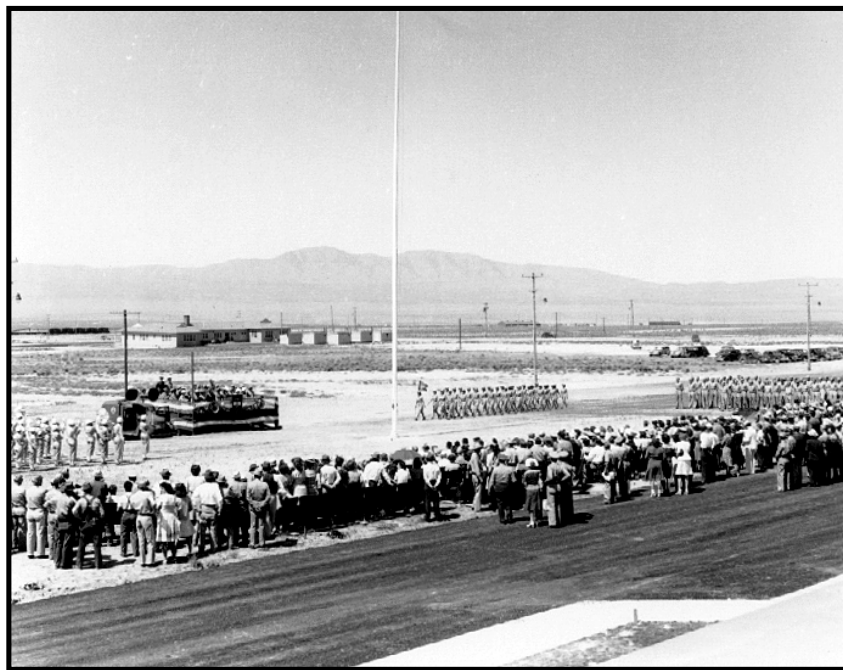
attended to witness the dedication of the world's largest, state-of-the-art Chemical Warfare Depot. The flagpole utilized at the ceremony was fabricated by depot employees using scrap material gathered during construction.

Civilian and military dignitaries included Gov. Herbert B. Maw, who gave the welcoming address for the state of Utah. Brig. Gen. Charles E. Loucks, Rocky Mountain Arsenal commanding general, addressed



the audience on behalf of the Chemical Warfare Services. Col. A.J. Babst, chief of Chaplains of the 9<sup>th</sup> Service Command, gave the invocation.

During his speech, Gen. Loucks said, *"It is fitting and appropriate to consider for a few moments the importance of this depot to the national defense. It is the only chemical warfare depot, which was designed and constructed independently of other establishments and it is the largest in the United States. You have built a great storage chemical warfare depot... and thereby provided an important factor in our national war effort. You have accomplished much, and as this flag is raised over this depot today you are entitled to thanks and congratulations for a job well done."*



DCD Inauguration Ceremonies, July 11, 1943. Civilian guests, depot employees and military personnel attended to witness the dedication of the world's largest, state-of-the-art Chemical Warfare Depot.

*"You have built a great storage chemical warfare depot... and thereby provided an important factor in our national war effort."*

—Gen. Charles E. Loucks,  
Rocky Mountain Arsenal  
Commanding General,  
Sun., July 11, 1943

Following the ceremonies, a reception was held at the Officers Club for all the guests. A 129-piece marching band from Kearns, Utah, comprised of the 390<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Air Corp Bands, played in the parade grounds at the flag raising and during the reception. The event also featured depot tours, a softball game, horse racing and boxing. The day concluded with entertainment and a dedication ball in the theater building.

And so, it came to pass that Rush Valley did indeed have a U.S. Chemical Warfare Depot.



DCD Dedication Reception, July 11, 1943. Left to right - DCD Commander Col. E.B. Blanchard, Gen. Charles E. Loucks, Gov. and Mrs. Herbert B. Maw, Brig. Gen. Ralph Talbot Jr. and Col. J.J. Babst (Chaplain).

## New and Improved... <http://www.pmcd.army.mil>

The U.S. Army is pleased to announce the availability of its redesigned Web site! Visit <http://www.pmcd.army.mil> to learn more about chemical weapons disposal in your community and across the country. The user-friendly site also features up-to-date information on meetings, information booths and other events in your area where you can learn more about this important mission. "Our new and improved Web site offers the public round-the-clock availability to current information about chemical weapons disposal," said PMCD Public Outreach and Information Chief Marilyn Daughdrill. "It also facilitates the great two-way communication we have established with our stakeholders over the years."

## Don't have access to the Web?

The Tooele Chemical Stockpile Outreach Office has a public access computer station you can use during regular business hours. No appointments are necessary, and the staff is available to help you find what you're looking for.

